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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN DELEGATION TO MONITOR PALESTINIAN
ELECTIONS; PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY FOR ISRAELI FM VISIT

REF: 04 TEL AVIV 06651

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. Jordan's FM, in coordination with Egypt, is looking for ways to return an ambassador to Tel Aviv this month. Silvan Shalom may visit Amman as early as January 12. Contradicting a previous announcement, Jordan is sending a mixed public/private sector delegation to help monitor the Palestinian election. End Summary.

2. (C) A Jordanian delegation headed by Senator Abdul Salam al-Majali will leave Amman on January 4 for the West Bank to observe Palestinian elections on January 9. According to Auda Abu Tayeh of the Foreign Minister's Private Office, the delegation is comprised of a several private and public individuals, including Interior Ministry Secretary General Mukhaimer Abu Jamous, the newly-appointed Director of the Department of Palestinian Affairs Wajih Azayzeh, and columnist Sultan Hattab (an East Banker known for his nationalist views). He noted that a former university president and other members of Parliament also would participate. Abu Tayeh said he was surprised at the announcement that a delegation would be sent; as of last week his understanding was there would be no Jordanian observers. (Note: Indeed, the GOJ spokesperson said as much during a press conference last week, despite an official invitation from the Palestinian Charge in Amman.)

3. (C) Abu Tayeh also confirmed that preparations are underway for a possible visit by Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom. He said the date was not yet set, but if it proceeds it likely will closely follow the Palestinian elections. He cautioned that "a lot can change between now and then," however, given the volatile regional situation. (Note: Local press reports indicated that Shalom will visit Jordan on January 12.) Abu Tayeh said specifics of Shalom's agenda were still being worked out, but he was unaware of the Israelis' interest in another Aqaba conference (ref).

4. (C) Meanwhile, Jordanian press quoted unnamed Jordanian "political sources" as saying that at the time of Shalom's visit, a number of Jordanian prisoners in Israel would be released. The sources ruled out that the four accused of killing Israelis before the peace treaty will be among those set free. Meanwhile, Jordan's newly-appointed Charge d'Affaires to Tel Aviv, Ali al-Ayed, arrived in Israel on January 2 to assume his new post. Foreign Minister al-Mulki has discussed with Charge his contacts with the Egyptians about coordinating the return of their ambassadors to Tel Aviv. Mulki said both states wish to make the move quickly after the Palestinian election, as that will be the most favorable moment. He said the Egyptians would like to have the initiative come from Abu Mazen, however, with a post-election statement to the effect that the Palestinian cause would be better served if Egypt and Jordan were engaged with Israel with resident ambassadors. Mulki acknowledged that Jordan had "boxed itself in" by insisting publicly on a prisoner release as a precondition; he was searching for some unspecified face saving way for Jordan to get around this self-imposed obstacle.

5. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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HALE